

# “Yesterday” : Yesterday was September 11, 2001. A Tuesday.

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I leave home 200 km beyond New York City for the three-hour drive into Manhattan. I make my way out of the quiet hills where I live, to drive into the metropolis to host my two weekly radio programs. This Tuesday, I would not reach work.

At 9:30 am, just an hour north of the city, I turn on my car radio.

A panicked broadcaster’s voice is reporting the catastrophic event underway in the city.

I pull off the road to listen more carefully. It takes but a moment for me, to register the magnitude of this news.

I find myself weeping uncontrollably over the wheel of my car. Cars slide pass me. Do those drivers know? Have they too heard? Do they also disbelieve the calamity we have entered? Are they rushing to sit with a friend, to turn on a TV to have real evidence? Newscasters repeat: “All bridges and tunnels into Manhattan are closed”.

I decide to continue southwards in the direction of New York City. Sapphire’s house is along this New Jersey route; so is Kay and Salah’s. I will stop at Paulette’s since her home is the first along my route. Before restarting the car, I open my cell phone and call my office, the radio station. Silence.

All lines are cut. The building from which we broadcast is barely 500 meters from the World Trade Center. Somehow I do not expect it is in danger. I need to join my colleagues at work doing what journalists must at such a time. I switch my car radio to 99.5 fm. Ahhh. We are sending out signals.

I hear the voices of colleagues: Jose, Sally, Burnard and Deepa.

They are calm, trying to make sense of the terror in the streets below them. I wish I were there. Not for the news scoop; there is no scoop on this. Our experienced announcers will use their voice to help our stunned public through this. I want to be with my colleagues to capture the immediacy of this calamity.

That’s one job of a journalist, especially broadcasters, in a moment of crisis. At 20 kilometers from Manhattan I reach the top of the hill, “Mountain View”. From here, one can make out the far-off skyline of Manhattan. I always find it a breathtaking spectacle; seeing the peaks of identifiable city buildings is reassuring somehow.

On this unhappy clear morning, reaching this crest on the road, I slow the car, and I gasp.

Something is missing. No sign of the two highest towers, those at the southern tip of Manhattan Island. All I can distinguish in that vicinity is an enormous cloud of smoke seeping skyward. I begin to weep again.

It is clear I cannot proceed across the George Washington Bridge so I abandon any idea of reaching the radio station. I exit highway 4 and within a few moments, pull into Paulette's drive.

On her television I witness the catastrophe. All channels—news, food, drama, marketing, sports, history—replay clips of the plane crashing into those buildings, then the softly, dropping towers, crumbling, sinking to the pavement. I pull out my phone again. Still no connection with the station. I try the home of a colleague living in lower Manhattan. Nothing. I manage to reach my family in a far away city; next I call the guests scheduled for tonight's broadcasts. The shows will be cancelled. Of course. I return to the TV. Paulette and her son and I hardly speak. As I watch the spectacular images (a spectacle indeed) of the impacting planes and the collapsing buildings, I feel sick, weak, stunned. Inside that inferno and among the fuming rubble are thousands of women and men are being incinerated, pulverized. The replays go on. And on. Each cycle takes but a few moments. But this rumble begins to deepen, to build a story and a fear and anger.

I know it will last a generation. I glare at the TV screen, wanting this to be just a film I can shut off. Every week, when I arrive in the city, I park my car uptown, then take the subway train to our downtown office, passing through the World Trade Center. Along with millions of commuters I exit the subway train that terminates under that maze of towers.

I pass through the busy mezzanine and out to the street to walk to the east end of Wall Street. This subway station is now a mass tomb. Those two towers are—were—so colossal; I have always been aware of their immensity. They dwarf everything around, even the 19-story building where I work. That was yesterday. Today, the day after, our lead radio station is not broadcasting. Neither are other communications centers in the neighborhood. Was our transmitter damaged, the electricity cut? Were we forced to evacuate?

My thoughts shift from the dead and dying to the future, not a distant future, but to the coming weeks and months.

Already newscasters are speculating that the perpetrators are Arab. This catastrophe is bound to affect Arab and Muslim Americans. It is going to bear down on every one of us, wherever we are in the USA. Not because of more terror attacks here. But because the authorities will launch a hunt. Expansion of intelligence activity across the country is inevitable.

But I could not imagine the universal ramifications that would ensue. After earlier, less horrific incidents, The US Congress had hastily passed an anti-terrorism law; the negative effect of on our civil rights is already apparent. Most Americans were unaware of this because the immediate target of those laws was one community—US Muslims and Arabs. New regulations were in place, here and abroad.

Congress had already granted greatly expanded power to our intelligence agencies and the civil liberties of our people had already suffered. Thirty hours have passed since that morning. Tuesday night I drove home, mournfully, slowly, silently. Any neighbors I meet volunteer child-like threats: "we'll get them"; "wipe them all out". They are afraid. All of us

are afraid for our future, the future of this disneyland of democracy and all the stuff we strive to possess, stuff that we take so for granted, for ourselves. I think; suddenly we all feel vulnerable in this invincible land. I know Americans will answer with revenge, not reflection. This frightens me most.

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### Further Reading



[THE 9/11 "BIG LIE". WHEN FICTION BECOMES FACT](#)

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